

WARD, ARTEMUS

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CONTEMPORARIES

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Abraham Lincoln's Contemporaries

Artemus Ward

Excerpts from newspapers and other
sources

From the files of the
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

From the New York "Play Bill."
ARTEMUS WARD'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY.
 BY HIMSELF.

NEW YORK, NEAR FIFTH AVENUE HOTEL
 (Opp. 31st St.)

DR. SIR: Yes, into which you ask me to send you sum leadin incidents in my life so you can write my Bogfry for the papers, cum dooly to hand. I hav no doubt that a article onto my life, grammattically jerked and properly punktoated, would be a addition to the chaos literatoor of the day.

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I next, tried my hand at giving blind-mau concerts, appearing as the poor blind-man myself. But the infamous cuss who I hired to lead me round towns in the day time to excite sympathy drank freely of a spirituous licker unbeknowns to me one day, and while under them infloocances, he led me into the canal. I had to either tear the green bandidge from my eyes or be drowned. I tho't I'd restore my eyesight.

In writing about these things, Mr. Editor, kinder smooth 'em over. Speak of 'em as eccentricities of gen'na.

My next ventur would hav bin success if I hadn't tried to do too much. I got up a series of wax figgers, and among others one of Socrates. I tho't a wax figger of Old Sock would be poplar with eddicated people, but unfortunatly I put a brown linen duster and a U. S. army regulation cap on him, which people with classycal eddycations said it was a farce. This enterprise was unfortunat in other respects.

At a certin town I advertised a wax figger of the Hon'ble Amos Perkins, who was a Railroad President, and a great person in them parts. But it appeared I had shown the same figger for a Pirut named Gibbs in that town the previs season, which created a intense toomult, & the audience remarked "shame onto me," & other statements of the same similarness. I tried to mollify 'em. I told them that any family possessin children might have my she tiger to play with half a day, & I would'nt charge 'em a cent, but alars! it was of no avail. I was forced to leave, and I infer from a article in the *Advertiser* of that town, in which the Editor says, "Altho' time has silvered this man's hed with its frosts, he still brazenly wallows in infamy. Still are his snakes stuffed, and his wax works unreliable. We are glad that he has concluded to never revisit our town, altho', incredible as it may appear, the fellow really did contemplate so doing last summer; when, still true to the craven instincts of his black heart, he wrote the higning knaves of the obscure journal across the street to know what they would charge for 400 small bills, to be done on yellow paper! We shall recur to this matter again."

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I will not speak of my once being in straitened circumstances in a certin town, and of my endeavorin' to accoomulate welth by lettin myself to Sabbath school picnics, to sing ballads adapted to the understand-

ins of little children, accompanying myself on a claironett—which I forgot where I was one day, singin, instead of "Oh, how pleasant to be a little child."

"Rhy snap—set 'em up again."

Right in the middle of a three-cent pie," which mistake, added to the fact that I couldn't play onto the claironett except making it howl dismal, broke up the picnic, and the children said, in voices choked with sobs and emotions, where was their home, and where was their Pa? and I said be quiet, dear children, I am your Pa, which made a young woman with two twins by her side say very angily, "Good heavens forbid that you should ever be the Pa of any of these innocent ones, unless it is much desirable for them to expire igminously up on to the murderers' gallus!"

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In your article, Mr. Editor, please tell 'em what sort of a man I am.

If you see fit to criticise my Show speak your mind freely. I do not object to criticism. Tell the public, in a candid and graceful article, that my Show abounds in moral and startlin curiosities, any one of whom is wuth dubble the price of admission.

I have thus far spoke of myself ex-cloosively as a exhibiter.

I was born in the State of Maine of parents. As a infant I attracted a great deal of attention. The nabers would stand over my cradle for hours and say, "How bright that little face looks! How much it nose!" The young ladies would carry me round in their arms, sayin I was muzzer's bezzy darlin and a sweetie 'eety little ting. It was nice, tho' I wasn't old enuff to properly appreciate it. I'm a helthy old darlin' now.

I have allers sustained a good moral character. I never was a railroad drector in my life.

Altho' in early life I did not inva'bly confine myself to truth in my small bills, I hav bin gradooally growing respectabler and respectabler ev'ry year. I luv my children, and never mistake another man's wife for my own. I'm not a member of any meetin house, but firmly b'leeve in meetin houses, and shouldn't feel safe to take a dose of laudum and lay down in the street of a village that hadn't any, with a thousand dollars in my vest pocket.

My temperament is bilious, altho' I don't owe a dollar in the world.

I am a early riser, my wife is a Presbyterian. I may add that I am also bald-headed. I keep two cows.

I liv in Baldinsville, Indiana. My next door naber is Old Steve Billins. I'll tell you a little story about Old Steve that will make you laif. He jined the church last spring, and the minister sed, "You must go home now, Brother Billins, and erect a family altar in your own house," where-upon the egrejis old ass went home and built a reglar pulpit in his settin room. He had the jiners in his house over four days.

I am 56 (56) years of age. Time, with its relentless scythe, is ever busy. The Old Sexton gathers them in—he gathers them in! I keep a pig this year.

I don't think of anything more, Mr. Editor.

If you should giv my portrait in connection with my Bogfry, please have me ingraven in a languisbin attitood, leaning on a marble pillar, leavin my back hair as it is now.

Treoly yours,

ARTEMUS WARD.

Weekly Journal, Chicago, Sept 20 1865



From the New York "Play Bill,"
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Tricolly yours, ARTEMUS WARD.

Weekly Journal, Chicago, Sept 26 - 1865

ARTEMUS WARD

FATHER OF AMERICAN HUMOR

It was September 22, 1862 . . . Abraham Lincoln sat in the conference room of the White House, deeply engrossed in a small book which he held eagerly in both hands, as the members of his War Cabinet entered and grimly took their places around the long table.

Every few moments the President would smile or chuckle at a particularly amusing portion of the book. Finally he lifted his eyes and scanned the tense, nervous faces of his subordinates.

"Gentlemen," said Lincoln, "did you ever read anything from Artemus Ward? Let me quote something that is very funny:

"'Always live within your income—even if you have to borrow money to do it.'"

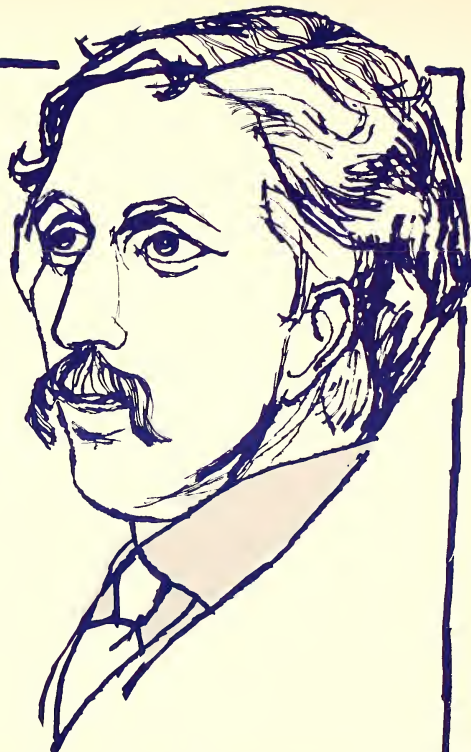
The President roared with laughter. No one else smiled. Lincoln threw the book upon the table and sighed heavily.

"Gentlemen, why don't you laugh?"

No one answered. "Why don't you laugh?" repeated the President. "With the fearful strain that is upon me night and day, if I did not laugh I should die. And you need this medicine as much as I do."

Then he put his hand into his tall hat that sat upon the table, and pulled out a sheet of paper. Turning to the men seated around him, he read it aloud.

It was a document he had composed the night before . . . an order that made "all persons held as slaves henceforth and forever free". . . the Emancipation Proclamation.



Artemus Ward (Charles Farrar Browne) was born in Waterford, Maine, on April 26, 1834. He became city editor of the Cleveland Plain Dealer in 1857, when he was 23 years old, and quickly earned national fame through his widely reprinted humorous articles under the Artemus Ward byline.

Three years later he went to New York to take over the editorship of Vanity Fair.

During this period he traveled around the country, giving tremendously successful lectures. Two volumes of his writings were published before he died from tuberculosis March 6, 1867, at the age of 33.

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A Giant Liner—"These Deep-Sea Merchant Ships Work With the Regularity of Railway Trains."

By Hefnerman From New York

HEAVY WEATHER FOR TRAMPS OF THE SEA

By CLAIR PRICE

LONDON.

tramp steamers are hard time. Considering all they have done in the world, they are not much to look at, being little more than

king war-houses with engines in them. You pass one of them in the ocean with her barn-like bow heaving into a bluster of sea and wind and her coal smoke flattening out far miles behind her

The Little Cargo Boats, Facing the Competition of Liner Service, Are Being Squeezed Out of the Trade Routes

in her ancestry as the fish tramp itself.

This is the British liner, a kind of ship which Kipling once described as a lady. As a matter of fact, the liner is several kinds of lady. She may be one of the gold-diggers of

organization which has studied that particular trade for sixty years or more.

She is big and expensive to run, because she has to pay for her shore organization in addition to her own

Atlas grows stout and size and speed to us which Countess "manned by boy."

he said of this strange

bill, but then there are old liners being flogged about the back seas by soulless engineers and the same thing may be said of them.

There are big new tramps at sea, many an old liner, but they are no match for the "on the be of consecutive during the bl are tramps that

THE HUMORIST WHO MADE LINCOLN LAUGH

This year marks the centenary of Artemus Ward—he was born on April 26, 1834. In his brief career, his life gave much merriment; his place among American humorists is dealt with in the following article by an essayist and humorist of today.

By STEPHEN LEACOCK

ON the morning of Monday, Sept. 22, 1862, Abraham Lincoln called his Cabinet together at the White House. He wished to announce to them what was undoubtedly the most momentous decision of his life. He was to read to them the proclamation which he had written the day before, setting free the slaves in the rebel States and destined to end American slavery forever.

But first Lincoln informed the Cabinet that Artemus Ward had sent him his new book and that he would like to read them a chapter of it. Accordingly, he read the "High-Handed Outrage in Utah."

In this little sketch-it contains only a couple of hundred words—Artemus describes how "in the fall" of 1856 he "showed his show in Utiky a troupy grate city in the state of New York." He says that "a big burly feller walked up to the cage containin my waz figures of the Lord's Last Supper and ceased Judas Iscariot by the foot and dragged him out on the ground."

"'Set I you egrulus are, that air a waz figure.'" "Set he ' "That's all very well for you to say but I tell you that Judas Iscariot can't show himself in Utiky with impunity by a darn side."

The dignified Salmon P. Chase, Secretary of the Treasury, listened with dry disapproval. "The President," he tells us in his diary, "seemed to enjoy it very much."

The Cabinet apparently laughed at it, except Stanton, the Secretary of War, who wouldn't. Then Lincoln laid the little book aside, and told the Cabinet that he was going "promiss to his States" which he proposed now to fulfill. With that he read aloud his Proclamation.

Nor are any two names more fitted to recall to us at once the mingled tragedy and laughter of life than those of Lincoln and Artemus Ward—both marked by fate, the one for martyrdom, the other for a tragic and premature death. For both of them life's tears and laughter, life's joys and sorrows, ran easily together. To both of them was given that higher vision, that larger and kinder wisdom, that which human nature knows none.

THE Artemus Ward of 1862 was already something of a national figure—his own name long since forgotten or nearly known. He had been born in 1834 and baptized as Charles Farrar Browne. His people lived in a village of Waterford, in Maine, and he enjoyed that rural and penurious upbringing that has been the privilege of so many great men on this continent. When he had finished school he learned how to set type and so became a journeyman printer, wandering round from town to town. The printer of those days was a sort of troubadour, carrying his composing stick, carrying the troubadour carried his guitar or Scott's Last Minstrel as he called it. Easily enough they changed from printers to composers, from artists to artists.

Browne wandered into Cleveland and there he settled down (18— a local reporter) on. The "City Dealer. His business was to write up anything that happened, or, if he didn't, to write up something else. Journalism was a sort of revolving commission, but most of all it was committed to move round in the surrounding locality and to write in a good one" on a rival town or a rival political party. So after a while young Browne invented the idea of "Artemus Ward"—supposed to be a traveling showman writing to the paper to give information

Artemus Ward, Born a Century Ago, Gave to the Nation in His Time "the Bright Happiness of Childish Merriment"

and to ask for it. These letters were the first of Browne's work that can perhaps be called "literary," as apart from mere news and personal items. Presently they transformed him into Artemus Ward.

It is very difficult for any reader of today to find much fun in these early sketches in The Plain Dealer, or to find them interesting in any but a biographical and historical

pieces of news to the paper. He finds just the name for him as "Artemus Ward"—the sound of it, on an old law document, had lingered from Charles Browne's childhood.

He makes out that the showman is just about to arrive! He's in Cincinnati, he's in Tiffin, he's in Toledo, and whenever he writes from it means a crack on that town. He tells his readers that in

it out of court. To us had spelling isn't funny.

People might well ask why had spelling was ever thought funny, but the explanation is not so very far to seek. We have to remember that although art is everlasting its form changes from time to time. Thus the art of the moving-picture—with its grotesque shadowed figures all lines and wrinkles, figures of people often twenty feet high (if you

And the voland has gone to his White House home; His back he has to the gold Broods on demontaining gold, And raising for an errand boy He calls for fifteen-minutes of

The same is true of that branch of the art of letters which was written humor. All our humor, if you trace it back to its origin, can be original source. Our laughter is the shout of triumph of the primitive against the modern, against something out of shape, who has, for instance, knocked in his enemy's skull with a tonalawk and "has the laugh on him. Later on humor softens down; not physical injury but the appearance of it, as when a man slips on a banana peel.

Then later still it comes to turn not on physical things but on the incongruities and contrasts and misfits of life. And here it hooks up easily with the form and art of words. We enjoy a kind of triumph over them by showing their misfits and contrasts. Thus the Victorian generation roared over "must Tom Hood lived on them, as witness his interminable belated, "Epping Hunt!"

John Higgins was as bold a man As ever trade did know. A workhouse good he had, that stood Hard by the church of Bow.

Here people bought Dutch cheeses round And single Gloucester flat, And Irish butter in a lump And Irish in a pot.

Six days a week behold him stand His business nest his heart, At counter with his apron tied About his counter part.

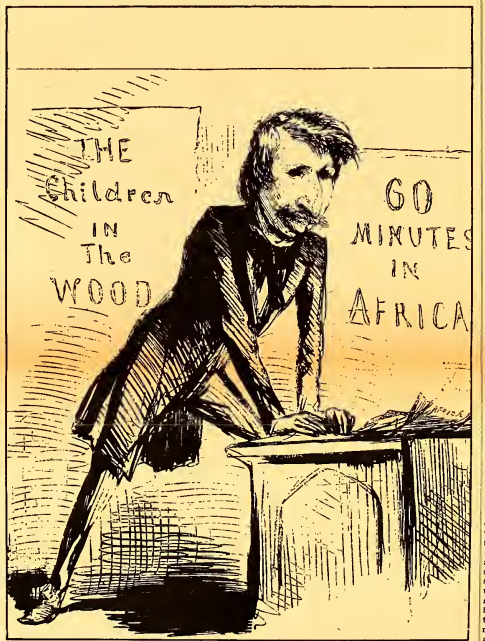
And so on and on. The form of humor, such as it is, lies in the triumph of making the words mean something they don't want to mean; all the better if a solemn and serious phrase can be dragged down to comicality.

NOW spelling in the days of Abraham Lincoln and Artemus Ward was a very solemn thing. It was the great art and mystery learned at school and brought to a high pitch of excellence by "scholars" who could spell ten words correctly one after the other. The "spelling bee" was a part of rural life. A good speller, like Lincoln, was already an eminent person. Hence the very prominence of spelling rendered it all the better mark for willful degradation. Bad spelling had in it something of the supreme fun of irreverence, without the evil conscience. Hence it came that Ward and his predecessors, and even those after him, as Josh Billings, revelled in bad spelling. Mark Twain had the sense to break away from it, and use it only in and through his characters for phonic effect. He realized that the expansion of education had left spelling to the primary school; grown-up people, for good or ill, were done with it.

At times, of course, the bad spelling of Artemus Ward, and of such followers as Josh Billings, was so ingenious as to be funny on that account—the misfit of legibility, prose that so ought to be verse. A supreme example is the word "wife" spelled by Josh as "yph." "Yph," spelled by Josh as "yph," can be designated a base constrictor snake for a "boy constructor."

Artemus Ward made the bad spelling exercise for us an irritating effect and makes the written humor of Artemus Ward a purely rhetorical device. But so too it was so candid enough to admit it—see the words of Homer and the Chanson de Roland, and dare we say "Milton"—and does some our marmur, Shakespeare? Ward is in good company!

Artemus presently (1860) became a contributor to Vanity Fair of New York and in this career he was at that journal. He worked on this paper in his own idiosyncratic and intermittent fashion. Some of his best sketches



Artemus Ward as a Very Popular Lecturer. (From "Vanity Fair", 1860.)

ences. They belong to another world, another day and another setting. In those earlier and restricted days journalism turned much on local jokes and local "cracks," especially as from one town to another. This form of humor is of course as old and as enduring as humanity.

Egypt made jokes about Rameses building the pyramid, Aristophanes at Athens took a rise out of Corinth. Chase took a crack at Stratford-on-Avon. In Ward's own boyhood, young Charles Dickens, speaking at dinner in America, made his most colossal hit as a humorist—it was at Richmond, Va., by "getting in a crack" at the new Richmond and Fredericksburg Railway.

So with the young Browne of The Plain Dealer. He lavents the notion that there is a "showman" traveling round and sending in

"Tiffin some one pasted his waz figure Judas Iscariot" and said that "Judas Iscariot couldn't show himself with impunity in Tiffin!" That was a big joke. It still is. Let a New Yorker read that Judas Iscariot had better not show up in Tonkers—or for a Boston reader warn him off Chelsea—or for a Montreal man keep him out of Verdun—and the joke retains all its original glory. This particular joke Artemus Ward thought so good that he used it again and again: It's in the Lincoln episode above; he lashed it to let it go; all humorists will sympathize.

THE form of the humor of these early sketches, apart from the local hits, depends very largely upon bad spelling, or at least comeliness had spelling with whatever other baste it may have. For the world today, this practically rules

measure them out at full length) with his "fade-outs" and "close-ups," "retrospectives" and "cut-ins" represents a mass of convention which has taken us twenty-five years to learn. We go and see something from which Leonardo da Vinci would have run away frightened and we call it a "sweet, simple story."

So with the art of letters, always one and the same as conveying in words an imagined picture of life, but altering its form and mode. The age of Milton had its vast epic poem, discussing hell in lengths of five feet. Walter Scott's contemporaries liked to hear a long story of bold adventure told in halting verse: such a form is now utterly out of date. Imagine, if one can, the bold adventure of the STRA set to Scott's verse:

The feast is o'er in Roome's fair bower,



Artemus Ward's America—Drawings He Used in His Lectures.
Left to Right—The Plains of Colorado; San Francisco, "the Imperial City"; the Stage Coach, Below—"Our Encounter With the Indian."

appeared in it in the years 1860 to 1862. Among these were his famous interview with President Lincoln, which he never had, and his various Civil War sketches which delighted Lincoln, who never saw him.

Whatever we may think of these "pieces" now, there is no doubt that they made a great hit and brought him a wide reputation. Artemus Ward, indeed, has often been called the first "national" humorist of America, though his celebrity and his achievement were soon to be far surpassed by that of Mark Twain, whose star rose just in the sunset of Artemus's brief day.

BUT Artemus Ward's growing fame was soon to rest not only on his written work but on his success as a platform humorist. He had not an odd turn for public appearance—as a Negro minstrel or as a comedian—as a sort of entertainer at large. Unlike most good "lecturers," he liked lecturing and he liked the wandering life that went with it.

He began professional lecturing in 1861 and visited a number of Eastern centres. This led him in 1862 to take ship via Panama for the new world opening up on the Pacific side of America. There he met and fraternized with Samuel Clemens, just turning into Mark Twain.

There is no doubt that as a platform lecturer Artemus Ward achieved a success equal, or almost equal, to anything in his day. The colored and sustained achievement of Charles Dickens whose performance seems to have contained a sort of magnetic power—had set a high standard for others to aim at; and Mark Twain was already beginning that unique career upon the public platform which was to extend over thirty years.

But Artemus, in his own way, called forth a tumultuous and almost affectionate response.

SUCCESS upon the public platform, in its highest form, is a rare achievement. A "lecture" can mean anything or nothing—or even less. It runs all the way from solid exposition to artistic "ecstasy." When a professor lectures on thermodynamics or radioactivity, there is no ecstasy. The professor does not get outside of himself and the audience keeps well within their. But when such a man as Charles Dickens lectured, he "carried away" both himself and his audience.

These supreme effects are not exactly obtained by acting. They depend on something else—a sort of magnetic stimulation of the imaginations of the audience. This may be done in different ways. Mark Twain did it by being Mark Twain, but Charles Dickens did it by not being Charles Dickens—by shifting somehow into the soul and body of Bill Bixie the murderer or becoming Mr. Pickwick and a group of Pickwickians all together. But no written record or transcription can convey the effect. It passes forever with him that produces it.

Artemus Ward had a technique and method of his own. In "actual

life he was—fill his fatal aim began to was him down—a merry creature, with an appealing eye, a ready smile and a pleasant laugh. On the platform he was solemnly itself. He affected an intense dullness of intelligence. His face was stamped with melancholy. He assumed an air of utter embarrassment, and in this mood, with his assumption of sorrow, he got off the little sayings and epigrams that he called his lectures. Ward's success was from the first overwhelming.

All people realize, as soon as they start to think about it, that there are two schools of humorous performers, the solemn and the hilarious—those who invite laughter by their own solemnity and those who seek it by infection from their own. There is no doubt that the latter is in general the harder task and the higher art. Any one can be solemn, if only with his own stage misery. But let any one try to come forward with a little merry, spontaneous laughter, and he will soon see how hard is the technique.

"Laugh and the world laughs with you," said Miss Eliza Wheeler. Will coo—or some one else. Many "humorists" would wish it were true. One must of course admit that both methods have their place. Among the funmakers of our own day one may set the wilful imbecility of Jack Pearl "going," a newly immigrated Ukrainian, beside the smiling and agreeable Chile Sale introducing the village choir accompanied on a "tither."

Just before Artemus was started for the West he had gathered his "pieces" into a little volume, "Artemus Ward, His Book." It went over "with tumultuous success." There was a sale of 40,000 copies, and Artemus received \$5,000, which lifted him to affluence. His newspaper salary had been only a mere trifle, and for the earlier lectures that he gave he only received from \$15 to \$25.

His book was published presently in London, and went with an immediate acclaim. It was a case of the method of extremes. Nothing could be further from the staid classical culture of England than the mind and thought of Artemus Ward; nothing further from the humor of Dickens and his imitators than what Artemus Ward brought from over the sea—irreverent burlesque and burlesque irreverence, gaudy exaggeration and the orthography of a printer's delirium. But the English seem to have delighted in the sheer "cussedness" of the new American humor.

There followed Artemus Ward's visit to England and his triumphant

comic entertainer but as a comic genius. The Savage Club opened its arms to Artemus, punch its columns and all London its ears. But it was all too bright to last. Artemus was wearing out, he was ill, he was dying. He gave up his work in the hope that rest and sea air might restore him. But his consumption had gone too far. He died at Southampton in March, 1887.

THIS short years of Artemus Ward's adult life were stirring times in America, a period of movement and territorial expansion greater than anything ever known before. When Artemus was a boy in a backwoods village of New England the United States practically ended at the Missouri River. Beyond that was a vast silent continent, the great plains—untamed except for wandering Indian bands—the huge barrier of the Rocky Mountains, the desert, and, far beyond all, the empty slopes of the Pacific. Here the banners of Spain Mexico drooped over crumbling forts and forgotten missions.

On all this fell the shock of the

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Drawings on This and the Preceding Page Courtesy New York Public Library.
Ward's Imaginary Show Comes to Town.



Artemus Ward: The Man Who Made Lincoln Laugh



From *Vanity Fair*, May 24, 1862
Artemus Ward as a public lecturer

by John J. Pullen

Abraham Lincoln's campaign for the Presidency in 1860 was modest in the extreme. He simply stayed at home in Springfield, receiving visitors and writing letters. However, this is not to say that Republican politicians were not active in his behalf or that political flimflammy was not at its customary height. Republican propaganda portrayed Lincoln as a poor but honest rail-splitter, and there was great traffic in the rails he had supposedly produced. These were carried by marching clubs, displayed at rallies, and used as general campaign symbols. One Republican newspaper described a rail on exhibit in Chicago as one of "3,000 split by 'honest Old Abe' 30 years ago on the Sangamon River bottom."

To young Charles F. Brown, associate editor of the *Cleveland Daily Plain Dealer*, a newspaper backing Stephen A. Douglas, it seemed proper to observe that Lincoln must have been frantically

busy to have split all those rails. Brown, in addition to carrying out his editorial duties, wrote a daily column entitled "City Facts and Fancies," and as one of the "fancies," he composed a story about a trip that the Official Committee, chosen to notify Lincoln of his nomination, made to Springfield. This group had found him splitting rails out in the woods, the story said, and it went on: "There stood Honest Old Abe in his shirt sleeves, a pair of homemade leather suspenders holding up a pair of homemade pantaloons. . . . 'Mr. Lincoln, Sir, you've been nominated, Sir, for the highest office, Sir,—' 'Oh, don't bother me,' said Honest Old Abe. 'I took a stent this mornin' to split 3 million rails afore night, and I don't want to be pestered with no stuff about no Conventions till I get my stent done.'"

A few weeks later a letter from Charles Hanks, Lincoln's cousin, appeared in the regular columns of the *Plain Dealer*, probably by Brown's choice. In the letter Hanks said, "I lived within two miles of the Lincoln farm from the time it was settled up to 1857, and during these early times our farms were subject to being wasted by devastating fires, and I know the fence around the Lincoln farm was consumed at least three times. And I know that after the Lincoln family had left the farm, . . . the fence was again burned. . . . I think, and I am almost certain, that the rails that are being worshipped all over the North as Lincoln rails, were made by poor Bill Strickland, who is now poor, blind, helpless, and in the Macon County poorhouse. And if these philanthropic Republicans would allow me to make one suggestion, it would be to help poor Bill Strickland, who really did make the rails, and who is as honest as Abe or anybody else."

The *Plain Dealer*, in addition to supporting Stephen A. Douglas in its reg-

ular editions, issued a weekly specifically aimed at promoting the Douglas candidacy. It was called the *Campaign Plain Dealer and Popular Sovereignty Advocate*. Brown was also associate editor of this publication, which by July of 1860 was running 40,000 copies a week. It is fairly certain that Brown secretly admired Lincoln; so it is understandable that the *Campaign Plain Dealer* was never particularly hard on the Republican candidate personally. There was nothing much worse than a mention of the Black Hawk War with reference to Lincoln's admitted homeliness: "The Indians, when they came to see his face, gave one whoop and surrendered." Political cartoons were printed, but the cartoonist was so bad that he defeated his own purpose; his caricatures were hardly recognizable as Abraham Lincoln or any other known human being. Rather than attacking Lincoln personally, the *Plain Dealer* concentrated on the unwisdom of electing a man whose inauguration would instantly move the country off the basis of rational discussion, however shaky, that it still maintained, and into the madness and slaughter of war.

In disposition and intellect, Abraham Lincoln and Charles Brown had much in common. Brown was what his young friend and fellow newspaperman in Ohio, W. D. Howells, once called "a Westernized Yankee." Said Howells, "He added an Ohio way of talking to the Maine way of thinking, and he so became a literary product of a rarer and stranger sort than our literature had otherwise known." In Maine after his father had died, Brown was put out by his mother at the age of 13 to be an apprentice printer. After he became a journeyman, he worked his way from printshop to printshop, and from type case to editorial desk, and arrived on the *Plain Dealer* at age 23. In the process, he had been knocked around a bit, and while preserving his good nature he had also developed a pronounced wariness toward religionists, politicians, and self-styled authorities of every kind. This philosophy is clearly evident in the essays Brown wrote for "City Facts and Fancies." One in particular, which pointed at certain obvious inconsistencies in religious dogma, went on to declare that "these contradictions

John J. Pullen, who is writing a book about Artemus Ward, is the author of several works, including *The Twentieth Maine*.

are too palpable, and only teach that man, God's own incarnate image, was never meant to trust in Prophets, Priests, Soothsayers, Apostles, nor in Angels even as infallible guides, only as phenomenon and fact harmonize with the Jove within the individual soul." (These words call to mind Lincoln's reservations concerning "the long, complicated statement of Christian doctrine.") The real enemy of mankind, as Brown saw it, was plain old humbug, usually preceded by "Thus saith the Lord" or "Thus saith the expert" or thus saith something other than one's own God-given common sense.

However, this deeper and more serious part of Brown's intellectual nature was to be obscured by another aspect of his character. A gaunt, angular young man whose trousers and sleeves never seemed quite to cover his long limbs, Brown customarily wore an aspect of soberness, even melancholy. Yet humor bubbled up out of him, as a friend said, "from a placid and almost serious countenance, as sudden and unexpected as a flash of lightning from a cloudless sky." One January day early in 1860, Brown was wondering how he could fill his column, and he thought of doing what he had done many times before—inserting a letter from a fictitious correspondent. He began, "Mr. Artemus Ward, proprietor of the well-known side show, writes us from Pittsburgh as follows . . ."

Once this antic figure had sprung out of Brown's ink bottle, it seemed to take on a life of its own. Artemus Ward continued writing to the *Plain Dealer*, describing, in eccentrically spelled letters, his strange adventures in various cities where he exhibited a collection of waxworks, "snaiks," and wild "beests," among which were "three moral bares." (Everything in those days—poem, song, story, play, even a sideshow, had to have a moral, and Artemus Ward's show conformed, even to his "moral waxworks of celebrated piruts and murderers.") A good deal of Brown's own philosophy came through in Artemus Ward. But once the American public had seized upon the Old Showman with delight (a process that was facilitated by the postage-free system of newspaper "exchanges" of that day), Artemus pretty much took over and Brown himself soon became known as Artemus Ward, frequently signing himself "A. Ward."

One of the things people liked about Artemus Ward was his good-natured

irreverence toward figures in high places. In an interview in Canada with the Prince of Wales, Artemus told Victoria's eldest son, "When you git to be King try and be as good a man as yure muther has bin!" Later, on the occasion of Edward's marriage to the Princess Alexandra, Artemus wrote him a letter containing this fatherly advice: "There's varis ways of managin' a wife, friend Wales, but the best and only safe way is to let her do jist about as she wants to. . . . Remember me kindly to Mrs. Wales, and good luck to you both." He was somewhat less cordial in speaking of American dignitaries. "I have allers sustained a good moral character.



From Artemus Ward in London
Artemus Ward, the showman, is
seized by one of his own "beests."

I never was a railroad director in my life." And, "I'm not a politician and my other habits air good." Congressmen he evidently considered to be beneath or unable to understand his customary kindness. "Go home you mizzeable devils!" he once told them. "Go home!"

The ideal citizen and statesman was "G. Washington." Artemus wrote, "Whare bowts can George's ekal be fownd? I ask & boldly anser, no whares, or eny whare else. . . . He never slopt over! The prevailin weakness of most public men is to SLOP OVER!" There is every evidence, in addition to Brown's having pulled his anti-Lincoln punches on the *Plain Dealer*, that Artemus Ward and his creator thought equally well of "A. Linkin." This feeling was to be demonstrated when Brown left the *Plain Dealer* and went to New York, where in 1861 he became editor of the

nation's leading comic weekly, *Vanity Fair*, dining in Pfaff's cellar restaurant with Walt Whitman, Thomas Bailey Aldrich, William Winter, Edmund C. Stedman, and others who were trying to make New York a literary capital distinct from the luminous and much more "respectable" Boston-Concord-Cambridge circle. On an equally exciting level, fame led him to the beginning of an affair with Adah Isaacs Menken, the actress and poet whose intellectual and physical qualities were later to fascinate so many other literary men.

In spite of these sophisticated big-city distractions, Brown continued to keep his feet on the firm earth of his Maine and Midwest background. On *Vanity Fair* he wrote, for example, a series of burlesques of the high-flown sentimental romances of the day. He also kept on using Artemus Ward as a delightful guerrilla warrior against whatever was pretentious, phony, or trite in America. But for A. Lincoln he had only sympathy.

One of the first Artemus Ward letters published by *Vanity Fair* presented the Old Showman visiting Lincoln at his home in Springfield right after his election and finding him overwhelmed by office-seekers, who were coming through the doors and windows and down the chimney, one even upsetting the President-elect while he tried to "crawl atween his legs for the purpuss of applying for the tollgateship at Milwawky." Artemus drove the troublesome crowd away by threatening to open his cages and let the "wild beests of pray" loose among them. In May 1862 the Artemus Ward pieces were collected in a book. This became a best-seller, helped not a little by an incident that took place preceding a meeting of Lincoln's Cabinet on September 22, 1862, as related by Edward M. Stanton, Secretary of War. When Stanton entered the room, he said, everyone was on hand waiting expectantly, but Lincoln was sitting there, chuckling and reading a little book. After a few moments he looked up and said, "Gentlemen, did you ever read anything from Artemus Ward? Let me read you a chapter that is very funny." He then read them "High Handed Outrage at Utica," a spoof on fundamentalist religion, short enough to be quoted in full:

In the Faul of 1856, I showed my show in Utiky, a trooly grate sittty in the State of New York.

The people gave me a cordyal recepsun. The press was loud in her prases.

I day as I was givin a descripshun of my Beests and Snaiks in my usual flowry stile what was my skorn & disgust to see a big burly fellow walk up to the cage containin my wax figgers of the Lord's Last Supper, and cease Judas Iscarrot by the feet and drag him out on the ground. He then commenced fur to pound him as hard as he cood.

"What under the son are you abowt?" cried I.

Sez he, "What did you bring this pussy-lanermus cuss here fur?" & he hit the wax figger another tremenjis blow on the hed.

Sez I, "You egrejus ass, that air's a wax figger—a representashun of the false 'Postle.'"

Sez he, "That's all very well fur you to say but I tell you, old man, that Judas Iscarrot can't show hisself in Utiky with impunity by a darn site!" with which observashun he kaved in Judassiss hed. The young man belonged to 1 of the first famerlies in Utiky. I sood him, and the Joory brawt in a verdict of Arson in the 3rd degree.

At the conclusion of the story Lincoln was convulsed with mirth. But according to Stanton, no one joined the President's laughter. After all, these were tragic times, and the members of the Cabinet were there, presumably, on serious business. "Well," said the President, "Let's have another chapter." Pausing to chuckle now and then, the President of the United States continued reading from the funny book in which he was referred to as "Old Abe Linkin." Stanton confessed to having been angered by what seemed to be pure buffoonery. He said he was considering walking out when abruptly Lincoln put the book down, sighed deeply, and said: "Gentlemen, why don't you laugh? With the fearful strain that is upon me night and day, if I did not laugh I should die, and you need this medicine as much as I do." Lincoln then proceeded to the matter at hand. "Gentlemen," he said, "I have called you here on very important business. I have prepared a little paper of much significance." It was the Emancipation Proclamation.

After Lincoln had read and explained the document, Stanton's attitude changed. As he recalled the moment, "I always tried to be calm, but I think I lost my calmness for a moment and with great enthusiasm I arose, approached the President, extended my hand and said: 'Mr. President, if reading the chapters of Artemus Ward is a prelude to a deed such as this, the book should be filed among the archives of the nation and its author should be canonized.'"

The book from which Lincoln read never made it to the archives, but it is

now in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale.

At odd moments Lincoln continued to derive relief and amusement from the pages of Artemus Ward, and he borrowed expressions from them from time to time. One of these has been characterized as the world's best book review: "Those who like this sort of thing will find this just the sort of thing they like." Lincoln gave it as his judgment when he was asked for his opinion of a work on a subject akin to spiritualism, and the wordplay can be traced to Artemus Ward. Carl Sandburg says that the witticism appeared in a fake endorsement, signed "O. Abe," which Brown fabricated to commend one of



From Artemus Ward His Book
Ward, the traveling showman, is
confronted by a female reformer.

his own lectures. It also appeared in a letter Brown wrote to a lady friend in London: "I send you my carte d'visite. It represents me in a studious attitude, and for those who admire my style of beauty it is undoubtedly just that style of beauty which people who admire my style of beauty admire."

On the day after the disastrous battle of Fredericksburg, Congressman Isaac N. Arnold of Illinois, calling at the President's office, found him again reading *Artemus Ward His Book*. Arnold was oppressed by the pall of gloom hanging over the North at that moment, and he couldn't help an expression of shock. Noticing his concern, Lincoln told him what he had told the Cabinet: that if he could not have found momentary relief from the crushing burdens of the war, his heart would have broken. On still another occasion a Union general found

him reading from *Artemus Ward His Book*—this time behind closed doors. Lincoln had learned by then that his fondness for Artemus was likely to be misunderstood.

SO FAR AS IS KNOWN, Lincoln made his last reference to Artemus Ward on April 5, 1865. The President was at City Point, Va., eagerly reading telegraphic dispatches from Grant's columns as they and Lee's forces moved toward their final rendezvous at Appomattox. Something about the pursuit reminded Lincoln of an Artemus Ward story, and he recited the yarn: a ridiculous tale about a canal boat called the *Sary Jane* that was chased by a pirate craft along the Wabash canal. (The *Sary Jane* escaped through the stratagem of scattering oats along the canal path, so that the mules who were hauling the pirate ship stopped to eat the oats while the *Sary Jane* drew ahead and out of danger.) Ten days later Lincoln was dead.

By then Charles F. Brown had become a popular comic lecturer, known as Artemus Ward but appearing as himself, a slim, elegantly clad, scholarly looking figure who said the most ridiculous things with an important air of owlish solemnity. He had traveled all over the country in this role. One journey had taken him to California and back, the return trip by stagecoach through hostile Indian country in the dead of winter; its highlights had been a visit with Bret Harte in San Francisco and a week's binge with Mark Twain in Virginia City, Nev., during which he had persuaded the young and then-unknown journalist to send some of his writings to publications in the East—including "Jim Smiley and His Jumping Frog" (the original title)—and also had demonstrated a lecturing style that Mark was to follow and improve on. With the end of the war, Artemus went on a tour of the South, where he was equally popular. At New Orleans, in January 1866, he gave a benefit for the impoverished wife and children of Jefferson Davis, who was then in prison, and as a result he was severely chastised by diehards in the North. In June 1866 he went to London, where he wrote for *Punch* and completely captivated the English with his lectures. A lingering animosity still existed between the two countries following conflicts incident to the Civil War, but as the *Times* said, "When two persons laugh together, they cannot hate each other much as long as the laughter con-

tinues." The lectures, which began November 13, 1866, promised to have a long run at Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly. Ward's old friend Henry Watterson, then in London, remembered that every evening of the performance was a sort of ovation, seats were engaged a week in advance, and up and down Piccadilly "carriages bearing the first arms of the kingdom were parked night after night. . . . The success was complete. As to an American, London had never seen the like."

But Artemus Ward was ill. He might have recovered with proper care and rest. Instead he pushed himself to the limit. Forced to retire from the lecture platform on January 23, 1867, he died on March 7 at the age of 33. His funeral in London two days later took place in miserable weather, with near-freezing temperatures, flurries of snow, rattlings of hail. Yet more than 2,000 persons, including leading writers, artists, and actors, crowded into the chapel where services were held. Sorrow and adulation continued in scores of articles, in a poem in *The Spectator*, and in scholarly analyses. All this was a matter of some surprise in America. It is true that Artemus had arrived in England at a time when the strength of democracy as demonstrated by Union victory in the Civil War had led the British to regard America with increased respect and with a more serious interest in its culture. And also with a new sympathy. Typical was the reaction of *Punch* to the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, whom it had savagely lampooned throughout most of the war. This had been one of the most remarkable examples of apology and self-chastisement ever seen in a magazine: the famous cartoon of Britannia placing a wreath on Lincoln's bier, with a poem on the facing page expressing sympathy and regret.

Still, the reception Artemus Ward had received in England was a surprising phenomenon to Americans. Soon after the Revolution, America had declared its intention to produce a national literature of its own and had ever since been nervously glancing over its shoulder at England, waiting for an admission that it had succeeded. This ambition had been the subject of insulting comments, such as those of Sydney Smith, who wondered why anyone would read an American book or why an American should write one. Why, indeed, when "a six-weeks' passage brings them, in their own tongue, our sense, science and

genius, in bales and hogsheads? Prairies, steamboats, gristmills, are their natural objects for centuries to come." As if in refutation of those snide remarks, America had produced, mostly in the more cultured centers of the East, writers of the caliber of Emerson, Hawthorne, Thoreau, Longfellow, and others who rivaled England's best; yet there had been only polite nods of approbation—no great enthusiasm. James Russell Lowell was sadly remarking about this time, "It will take England a great while to get over her airs of patronage about us."

And now, after all that, here was England idolizing an *Artemus Ward*!

It appeared that what England con-



From *Artemus Ward His Book*
The traveling showman is assailed
by a gang of youthful "seseshers."

sidered admirable and distinctive was not coming from the halls of learning in the East, whence it should have come, but from the land beyond, of prairies, steamboats, and gristmills. It may be that this interpretation is oversimplified or at least too geographical. Then—and later—the English have seemed inclined to patronize American writers who write like Englishmen, as though saying, "Why should we admire them for what we do better?" Hence, perhaps, their admiration for Artemus Ward and later for Damon Runyon.

The point, whatever it was, made by Ward's great success in England was not missed by Bret Harte, Mark Twain, and others of similar distinction who crossed the ocean to enjoy in England a welcome that Artemus had to some degree prepared for them—writers upon whom

Ward had exercised an influence long before he left for London. In his book *San Francisco's Literary Frontier* Franklin Walker expresses the opinion that to Bret Harte, Artemus Ward was a revelation of a quality which was truly native to America—and that taking direction from this, Harte turned from the life of books to the life he found around him in the rough and vigorous mining camps. As for Mark Twain, W. D. Howells wrote that "in some of his beginnings Mark Twain formed himself from, if not on, Artemus Ward," although Howells was quick to point out that Twain's greater talent soon carried him far beyond imitation. A more general influence is noted in *The Times of Melville and Whitman* by Van Wyck Brooks, who said that Ward "was largely effective in changing the tone of thought and speech in more than one respect during these decades, deflating the bombast that throve on the stage with 'world-renowned tragedians,' in Congress, in thousands of orations on the Fourth of July. He made it impossible thenceforth to take their pomposity seriously, for he had a sharp eye for the pretentious and trite, and the change to a more natural style that followed in the press and the theatre alike was due in some measure at least to Artemus Ward."

Thus, although it could hardly be said that Ward contributed much directly to the "native American literature" everyone was looking for, in one way or another he had an effect that went far beyond his actual literary accomplishments. He had given emphasis to something written by his former associate Walt Whitman: "Always waiting untold in the souls of the armies of common people, is stuff better than anything that can possibly appear in the leadership of the same." In the same tone, *The London Review* said of A. Ward what it might also have said of his friend A. Lincoln: that his genius "was like our church service, in one respect, that is, made 'to be understood of the common people.'"

A dispatch received by Secretary of State William H. Seward in Washington from one of his diplomats in England said, "The death of Mr. Brown has caused universal regret among the literary men of this country." Reading it, Seward could not have failed to remember the day when *Artemus Ward His Book* and the Emancipation Proclamation had lain on the table side by side. □

